MARVEL COMICS

X-MEN

AUG '96 3

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CYCLOPS AND PHOENIX™

BIRTH OF A NIGHTMARE...

...DEATH OF A DREAM!

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

19th Century London...

THE X-MEN'S DARKEST HOUR!

The Ancient Conqueror known as *Apocalypse* has defeated *Cyclops* and *Phoenix* – and offered the renegade scientist *Nathaniel Essex* a *Faustian deal!*

Little does Essex realize that *tragedy* is poised to strike at his very heart – a *catastrophe* that will force him into a decision that could forever change the course of mankind's fate!

DIRECT EDITION

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1859

LONDON.

Stan Lee Presents:

THE ORIGIN OF A SPECIES

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WHO... ARE YOU?

WHAT ARE YOU?

I SAW YOU *FLY!*

YOU MADE *SOLID OBJECTS* MOVE THROUGH THE AIR!

YOU ARE... YOU MUST BE A PRECURSOR OF THE *GREAT MUTATION* THAT I HAVE PREDICTED.

PROOF THAT I AM RIGHT! AND THE POMPOUS FOOLS WHO RIDICULED ME... *WRONG!*

THERE IS NO ANSWER FROM JEAN GREY, THE TELEPATHIC X-MAN CALLED PHOENIX. AND AS HER BEARINGS RETURN, SHE STIFLES A SHUDDER.

FOR NOT ONLY HAS SHE BEEN PULLED MORE THAN A CENTURY INTO THE PAST BY THE TIME-SPANNING ASKANI...

... AND, ALONG WITH HER HUSBAND SCOTT SUMMERS, BEEN ASSIGNED THE BURDEN OF PREVENTING THE RISE OF THE AGELESS VILLAIN APOCALYPSE...

... SHE NOW FINDS HERSELF IN THE COLD ARMS OF NATHANIEL ESSEX...

... A MAN SHE KNOWS IS DESTINED TO PREY UPON HUMANITY AS THE MAD GENETICIST KNOWN AS

SINISTER!

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SCARPER, OSCAR, ME LAD, THAT'S *ONE* LADY THAT CAN LOOK AFTER 'ERSELF.

ESSEX! THIS OFFER THAT *APOCALYPSE* HAS MADE YOU...

... JOIN HIM, AND YOU'LL DAMN THIS PLANET TO UNTOLD *PAIN* AND *SUFFERING!*

WHO *ARE* YOU, WOMAN -- AND BY WHAT POWER DO YOU JUDGE *ME?*

THE BEING YOU SPEAK OF HAS WALKED THIS EARTH FOR COUNTLESS AGES --

-- IMAGINE THE KNOWLEDGE HE'S GATHERED... THE *WONDERS* HE'S SEEN!

MY HUSBAND... HE IS NOT SO VERY UNLIKE YOU. HE ALMOST LOST HIS OWN SON FOREVER... BECAUSE OF THAT CREATURE.

HE, LIKE YOU, IS A PASSIONATE, DRIVEN MAN. AND HE HAS SUFFERED *GREATLY...*

...BUT HE DOESN'T LET THAT *RUIN* HIM.

IRRELEVANT.

ALL THAT MATTERS... IS MY *WORK...*

WHAT IS THE FATE OF *ONE MAN* COMPARED TO THE FUTURE OF A *SPECIES?*

WHAT ABOUT *REBECCA,* YOUR *WIFE?*

NO!

WHATEVER CHANCE I HAD OF HAPPINESS... WITH HER --

-- WITH OUR UNBORN *CHILD* --

-- IS *GONE!*

IT'S *NEVER* TOO LATE! WE CAN CHANGE! WE HAVE A *CHOICE!*

IT'S WHAT MAKES US *HUMAN!*

OSCAR?

JUS' KEEP MOVIN'... DON'T LOOK BACK...

THERE'S STILL *TIME..!*

STILL... TIME?

Oh LORD...

WHAT GREATNESS... WHAT EXALTED CLIMES OF SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENT WOULD I FORGO...

... IF THAT WERE ONLY TRUE

NOSH...

...SHO... FASHT...

...ME OLD MUCKER...

YEEUGHH!

COOTIE TREMBLE, ERSTWHILE LONDON THIEF...

I'VE GOT A HORRIBLE *PAIN* ALL OVER ME BODY, OSHCAR...

...BUT CAN'T RESIST THE *TEMPTATION*...

...TO **RIP** YOUR TREACHEROUS BLEEDIN' 'EAD OFF!

'ELP! 'ELP!

GOOD LORD — THAT MAN! WHAT HAS APOCALYPSE *DONE* TO HIM?

ESSEX WILL HAVE TO *WAIT*...

KRAK

GWUNNG!

...BUT I THINK I'M ACTUALLY GETTING *THROUGH* TO HIM!

UGHH!

SOMETHING IS WRONG, HE THINKS.

HIS WORK HAS BEEN OBSESSED WITH THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST.

HOW DOES WHAT HE IS WITNESSING FIT INTO THIS SCHEME OF THINGS?

HE ALWAYS PRESUMED THAT WHEN THE GREAT MUTATION CAME, A CHOSEN FEW WOULD HAVE THE CORRECT ESSEX FACTOR...

...AND THESE ESSEX MEN WOULD, BY DINT OF THEIR SUPERIOR NATURE, ECLIPSE THEIR COUSINS FURTHER DOWN THE EVOLUTIONARY LADDER.

WOULD DIVERGE FROM THE UN-MUTATED RABBLE.

BUT THIS WOMAN...

...RISKING HER OWN LIFE...

...TO SAVE THE STINKING HIDE OF A LOWLY THIEF...

...HOW CAN THAT AID IN HER OWN SURVIVAL?

COULD IT BE THAT IN THE FUTURE SOME OF THE MUTATED ONES...

...THOUGH A DIVERGENT SPECIES...

...WILL REMAIN IN EVERY WAY THAT MATTERS, HUMAN?

IT IS TOO MUCH!

HIS MIND IS REELING!

HE MUST AWAY.

ESSEX... *GONE*... DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO GO AFTER HIM.

GOT TO FIND SCOTT... WE HAVE LESS THAN A DAY TO STOP *APOCALYPSE*.

MIGHT BE ABLE TO RECIP... *RECIPRA*...

...*RETURN* THE FAVOR THERE, MISS.

I KNOWS THE SEWERS AND BACKWATERS OF THIS TOWN LIKE THE BACK OF ME WHATSIT.

GOOD.

SCOTT, CAN YOU *HEAR* ME?

JEAN REACHES OUT TO HER HUSBAND THROUGH THEIR TELEPATHIC RAPPORT...

...EVEN AS...

...BENEATH THE STREETS OF LONDON, THE ALIEN STRONGHOLD HAS REMAINED HIDDEN FOR CENTURIES...

...AWAITING THE DAWN OF A DARK AGE...

...THE RESURRECTION OF APOCALYPSE!

NNGGG!

TAKING A HAMMERING.

BLACKED OUT FOR A WHILE BACK THERE.

CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNS TO SCOTT SUMMERS, ALSO KNOWN AS THE MUTANT CYCLOPS.

YOU WAKE! NOW TELL ME WHENCE YOU DERIVE YOUR POWERS.

THOUGH PUNY COMPARED TO THE MIGHT OF APOCALYPSE, YOU HAVE NEVERTHELESS PROVED A WORTHY OPPONENT.

OPEN YOUR EYES, SCUM — APOCALYPSE COMMANDS YOU!

OPEN MY EYES?

WITHOUT THE PROTECTION OF HIS RUBY QUARTZ VISOR --

ANYTHING YOU SAY!

...SCOTT SUMMERS' MUTANT OPTIC BLASTS ARE BEYOND HIS CONTROL.

UGNNH!

YOU ARE... EVEN STRONGER... THAN I SUSPECTED.

EVEN I... CANNOT WITHSTAND IT... FOR LONG!

WHO... ARE YOU?

SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE HAPPY...

...NEVER TO HEAR YOUR NAME AGAIN!

UNNG! NO GOOD!

COULDN'T MAINTAIN MY OPTIC BLASTS AT THAT LEVEL OF... INTENSITY!

YOU SPEAK... AS THOUGH IN POSSESSION OF... SECRET KNOWLEDGE.

BUT KNOWLEDGE IS NOTHING WITHOUT POWER

IT IS OVER!

SINCE *TIME IMMEMORIAL* I HAVE SOUGHT ONE SUCH AS *MYSELF* --

-- A *SIGN* THAT A NEW ERA IS ABORNING!

YOUR APPEARANCE PROVES YET AGAIN THAT THE HOUR OF MY *ASCENDANCY* IS AT HAND!

THOUGH IT SADDENS ME THAT A TRUE WARRIOR LIKE YOURSELF...

... SHOULD WASTE YOUR LIFE ON THOSE TOO PUNY TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. THIS PROVES YOU ARE NOT FIT TO SURVIVE.

KRAK

WHAT'S..?

APOCALYPSE'S MACHINERY... *TECHNO-ORGANIC*... JUST LIKE WHAT WE'VE FACED IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY!

SEE HOW THE STRONGHOLD SHIFTS AND ALTERS SHAPE TO RESTRAIN YOU!

AS THOUGH THE VERY *LAWS OF NATURE* OBEY ME!

YOU WILL NOW SUFFER -- EXPERIENCING PAIN ON A HITHERTO UNDREAMED OF SCALE.

BUT *FIRST*...

ALIEN METAL FLOWS LIKE COOL LAVA, HIS OPTIC BLASTS BURN THROUGH IT...

...BUT THE CLEVER METAL SPEEDILY RECONSTITUTES ITS CHEMICAL MAKEUP...

...LIKE A SPECIES ADAPTING TO NEW ENVIRONMENTS.

UNTIL A NEW ELEMENT IS BORN...

... IMPERVIOUS TO CYCLOPS' FORCE BEAMS.

EXCELLENT.

YOU SEE YOUR REFUSAL TO TELL ME WHAT I WANT TO KNOW AS A SIGN OF *STRENGTH*. IT IS *NOT*.

A MISGUIDED LOYALTY TO OTHERS THAT DESTROYS YOURSELF IS A *WEAKNESS*, A *ROTTENNESS*.

ONE THAT ASSURES MY ULTIMATE SUPREMACY OVER *OUR KIND*.

BY THE TIME I RETURN YOU WILL BE BROKEN... AND PREPARED TO LAY BARE YOUR VERY SOUL TO ME.

TRUST THE WORDS OF ONE WHO HAS LIVED *HUNDREDS* OF LIFETIMES...

... WHOSE MOST ANCIENT ENEMIES HAVE LONG BEEN BUT *DUST* IN THE DUNES OF EGYPT.

YOU CANNOT COMBAT STRENGTH WITH GOODNESS OR LOYALTY... ONLY WITH *GREATER* STRENGTH.

SO ENDETH YOUR FINAL LESSON.

ON THE ROAD SOUTH TO KENT...

...THE HORSE'S HOOVES SEEM TO BEAT A CONSTANT REFRAIN...

REBECCA... REBECCA... REBECCA...

REBECCA!

HOW COULD I EVER THINK OF *FORSAKING* YOU?

HOW I LONG FOR THE WARMTH AND SUCCOR OF OUR MARRIAGE!

I WILL DEDICATE MY LIFE TO YOU AND OUR CHILD...

...AND TO FIGHTING THE *MALADY* THAT TOOK OUR *ADAM* FROM US!

I *CAN* BE GOOD, REBECCA! I CAN CHANGE! ISN'T ALL MY WORK AN *HOMAGE* TO NATURE'S ABILITY TO CHANGE?

BUT WHEN MILBURY HOUSE COMES INTO VIEW...

MY GOD! THE FREAKS! THE POOR SOULS I KEPT *INCARCERATED!*

BUT -- WHO LET THEM *FREE?*

THE YOUNG BOY NAMED DANIEL APPROACHES...

'TWAS YOUR WIFE FREED US, SIR. AND THAT OTHER LADY THAT DOES SPEAK *INSIDE* YOUR HEAD...

...HER THAT GOT ME TALKING AGAIN, SIR.

WHERE IS MY *WIFE?* HAS ANY-ONE...

AIEEE

THE WORDS DIE IN HIS MOUTH.

THAT SOUND!

A PITIFUL, BEREFT, ALMOST INHUMAN WAIL OF *SORROW.*

FROM THE HOUSE...

REBECCA!

THE AIR IN HER BEDROOM IS HEAVY WITH SICKNESS.

BUT HE SEES HER! AND HE ALLOWS HIMSELF — THE FOOL — A FLICKER OF HOPE.

REBECCA --!

PLEASE, SIR! QUIET! I HAVE ONLY JUST CALMED THE POOR GIRL.

BUT... THE CHILD —

IS DEAD, GOOD SIR.

BORN PREMATURELY... PERHAPS INDUCED BY SOME SUDDEN STRESS.

OH, REBECCA. I AM SO... SO SORRY. PLEASE... FORGIVE ME.

BUT THIS IS NOT THE *END*, MY LOVE. WHEN ADAM DIED... I WITHDREW FROM YOU. YOU SUFFERED *ALONE*.

BUT I SWEAR, ON MY LIFE, YOU SHALL *NEVER* BE ALONE AGAIN.

I REALIZE NOW THAT YOU MEAN MORE TO ME THAN MY WORK, MORE TO ME THAN MERE *SCIENCE*...

... I HAVE RETURNED TO YOU, SWEET REBECCA. WE SHALL *LIVE* AGAIN. WE SHALL LAUGH AGAIN.

MISTER ESSEX... PLEASE WRING WHAT *SOLACE* YOU CAN FROM THESE LAST PRECIOUS MOMENTS WITH YOUR WIFE...

... FOR I AM AFRAID HER TIME GROWS SHORTER WITH EACH PASSING MOMENT.

NO! REBECCA, YOU *CANNOT DIE!*

COURAGE, MAN, THERE IS NOTHING TO BE DONE.

NATH... NATHANIEL...

... MY HUSBAND...

... YOU ASK FOR MY... *FORGIVENESS.*

THIS... I *CANNOT*... GIVE YOU.

REBECCA!

SHHH. LET ME SPEAK, WHILE I CAN.

I LOVED YOU, NATHANIEL ESSEX. AT FIRST... IT WAS ONLY DUTY...

...BUT I GREW TO LOVE YOU... WITH ALL MY HEART.

NO! IT IS TOO CRUEL! I *REFUSE* TO LET YOU DIE!

SOME THINGS ARE BEYOND... EVEN *YOUR* POWER, NATHANIEL. IF ONLY YOU COULD HAVE ACCEPTED THAT...

...THINGS MIGHT HAVE BEEN *DIFFERENT.*

THINGS *CAN* BE DIFFERENT!

I HAVE TURNED MY *BACK* ON THE MONSTER I MIGHT HAVE BECOME!

I WAS SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU WERE SO BRILLIANT, SO... *ROMANTIC*, IN YOUR OWN WAY.

BUT AFTER ADAM DIED, YOU BECAME TWISTED.

TWISTED... AND *CRUEL.*

CRUEL? NO, I NEVER MEANT TO BE...

NO, YOU ARE *RIGHT*. AS EVER, DEAR REBECCA... YOU ARE THOROUGHLY RIGHT.

AND I AM DAMNABLY... *WRONG.*

BUT YOU *MUST* HOLD ON... I SHALL SAVE YOU... I SHALL USE *ALL* MY GENIUS!

YOUR *GENIUS!* SEE WHERE YOUR SO-CALLED *GENIUS* HAS BROUGHT US, NATHANIEL!

IN THE END I FELT... AND FEEL... NO LOVE FOR YOU. YOUR... *GENIUS* HAS SEEN TO THAT.

YOU ARE MY HUSBAND, BUT YOU... *DISGUST* ME.

YOU HAVE MADE ME LOSE... MY CHILD.

...TO ME... YOU ARE... UTTERLY...

...AND CONTEMPTIBLY...

...*SINISTER!*

HEARS HER DEATH RATTLE.

...THE END [illegible] HOPE...

...AND THE BEGINNING OF A DARK AND TERRIBLE AGE.

THERE ARE MANY STONES IN THE ESSEX FAMILY CEMETERY.

SOME DATE BACK TO THE TIME OF KING JOHN.

ADMIRAL [illegible] ESSEX
DIED
FEBRUARY [illegible] 1170
Asked my Friends

AND HE CAN SMASH THEM ALL.

HE CAN CRACK EVERY STONE WITH THE ESSEX NAME CARVED ABOVE THE PIOUS INSCRIPTION.

HE CAN DIG UP THE SKELETONS THAT LIE BENEATH AND CRUSH THEM TO DUST AND BURN THEM TO ASHES.

BUT HE CANNOT ESCAPE.

FOR THESE BONES MADE HIM.

WHATEVER INFORMATION THEY CARRIED AND PASSED ON STILL RUNS THROUGH HIS BODY.

AND WHEN EVERY STONE AND EVERY SKELETON HAS BEEN DESTROYED...

...HE IS STILL NATHANIEL ESSEX.

AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY HE MIGHT ESCAPE FROM THAT.

Oh DEAR GOD... IF ONLY...

...IF ONLY I COULD TURN BACK TIME!

ERA
ESSEX
1205

NO! FOOL! THERE IS NO GOD!

AND TIME IS NOT A HIGHWAY... DOWN WHICH WE CAN TRAVEL.

THIS BED
INFLUENCE
Hellfire Club.
ARE THE SHROUDED MEN.
THE SILENT MEN.
WORLD -- AND ITS UNWITTING POPULATION...
...FROM THE SHADOWS.
PERVASIVE THAN THEMSELVES!
HOW DARE THIS ABOMINATION SUMMON US... AS THOUGH WE WERE HIS *SLAVES!*
YOU SAW HIM, FRANZ. WE ARE EITHER HIS *SLAVES*...
...OR HIS *VICTIMS.*
WE *NEED* A *STRONG LEADER*. THE SERFS ARE BECOMING TROUBLESOME IN RUSSIA.
AND THAT UGLY FOOL *LINCOLN* IS GOING TO CAUSE TROUBLE.
WE DON'T NEED AN *OUTSIDER* TO DEAL WITH *THAT*.
BUT WE CANNOT STAND AGAINST HIM! HE IS NOT *HUMAN!*
HUMBUG! WE SHOULD *SHOOT* THIS FOREIGN BLACK-GUARD...
...RIGHT BETWEEN...
...THE...
YOUR... uh... *EXCELLENCY..!*
HUHGMNN!
SEE HOW THE SO-CALLED *POWER* PLOT AND SCHEME AND QUIBBLE...
...LIKE *LITTLE CHILDREN!*
ONLY THE FACT THAT YOU WILL BE OF SOME USE TO ME...
...STOPS ME TEARING THE *TONGUES* FROM YOUR BLEATING THROATS.

I HAVE MADE A *STUDY* OF YOUR AGE.

IT HAS A SOFT UNDERBELLY, WHICH I WILL TEAR OPEN WITH THE RAGGED TEETH OF *SETH.*

MY TACTIC SHALL BE AN HONORABLE AND TIME-TESTED ONE, WELL-DOCUMENTED IN THE PAPYRI OF OLD EGYPT...

...THROUGH TO THE WRITINGS OF OTHER WISE *FOOLS*...

...*WAR AND PESTILENCE!*

MISTER ESSEX SHALL DEVELOP THE PESTILENCE... AND, IN *TIME,* THROUGH BREEDING...

...HELP [redacted] TO CONTROL THOSE WHO WOULD [redacted] BORN WITH THE POWER TO STAND AGAINST ME!

YOU DOGS WILL PROVIDE THE CONDITIONS FOR *GLOBAL UPHEAVAL* AND *CONFLICT!*

FOR ONLY IN THIS MANNER SHALL THE WEAK BE *CULLED* FROM THE *STRONG.*

MY PLAN IS A LONG-TERM ONE...

...FOR IT MIGHT BE SOME YEARS BEFORE THE GREAT NATIONS OF THE WORLD FINALLY *CLASH*...

...AND FROM THE BLOODY RUINS OF THIS MODERN GOLGOTHA...

...NEWER AND MORE TERRIBLE CONFLAGRATIONS SHALL ARISE.

INDUSTRY, CRAFT, WISDOM...

...COUPLED WITH BARBARITY, SADISM AND MADNESS.

WHERE THERE IS *HOPE,* CRUSH IT. WHERE THERE ARE THE SEEDS OF *FREEDOM*...

...*DESTROY* IT.

WHERE THERE IS PREJUDICE, IGNORANCE, HATRED, INJUSTICE...

...*NURTURE* IT.

GIVE ME *WAR*, GENTLEMEN. GIVE ME *DESPAIR*. GIVE ME... *CARNAGE*.

FRANCE AGAINST PRUSSIA... RUSSIA AGAINST JAPAN... BROTHER AGAINST BROTHER... WORKERS AGAINST WORKERS... WHITES AGAINST BLACKS...

...FOR THE *AGE OF APOCALYPSE*, THE ERA IN WHICH ONLY THE FIT *SURVIVE*... BEGINS *NOW!*

Ahem.

I PRESUME... YOU WILL [redacted] AT THE VANGUARD... OF THIS... MOVEMENT?

LEADING THE WAY?

I DO NOT WISH TO UNITE HUMANKIND AGAINST A COMMON FOR, SO AT FIRST, I SHALL STAY IN THE BACKGROUND...

WHEN THE PLANET IS RAVAGED BY WAR AND DISEASE... I SHALL APPEAR LIKE THE REAPING [redacted]IND.

YOU WILL AWAIT THE SIGNAL FOR YOUR WORK TO BEGIN.

AH... YOUR GREATENESS...

HOW WILL WE KNOW THIS... SIGNAL?

DO NOT FEAR. YOU WILL KNOW.

YOU WILL KNOW.

AN OLD SEWER BY THE RIVER THAMES.

SCOTT! I CAN [redacted] HIM... I'M GETTING CLOSER...

HE'S *SUFFERING* -- BEING *TORTURED!*

CAN'T HOLD OUT... MUCH LONGER...

ALIEN WEAPONRY... BOMBARDING ME...

... BUT I'LL *DIE* BEFORE... I REVEAL WHO WE ARE...

CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT ESSEX —

— HOW HIS *OWN* TRAGEDIES SO CLOSELY MIRROR WHAT SCOTT WENT THROUGH WITH *CABLE* —

— WHICH ESSEX HIMSELF, AS SINISTER, WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR!

ESCORTED BY THE ERSTWHILE MARAUDER NAMED OSCAR STAMP...

... JEAN GREY THROWS HER MIND THROUGH THE DARK, CHTHONIC PASSAGEWAYS OF THE CITY...

THIS WAY, MILADY.

JUDGING BY THEM SCREAMS, RECKON THAT BLOKE OF YOURS [redacted] JUST 'ROUND THE CORNER!

'E'S SURROUNDED BY BLEEDIN' *MARAUDERS!*

COME ON, BLIND BOY, *TALK.* 'OO ARE YOU? WHAT YOU DOIN' 'ERE?

'IT 'IM AGAIN, REGGIE. *'ARD.*

SCOTT! ARE YOU --

I'M... OKAY, JEAN. I HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS LOUD AND CLEAR.

JEAN... BE CAREFUL... SOME OF THESE GOONS HAVE BEEN... ENHANCED -- MUTATED BY APOCALYPSE'S TECH-NOLOGY...!

NOT TO WORRY, LOVER...

...IT'LL TAKE A LOT MORE THAN THEM...

...TO COME BETWEEN ME...

...AND YOU!

PHOENIX'S INCREDIBLE MENTAL POWERS UNLEASH A BLISTERING PSI-ASSAULT.

OHWWW!

CAUGHT BY SURPRISE, THE MARAUDERS ARE TELE-KINETICALLY HURLED THROUGH THE DANK AIR OF THE SEWER.

AND LIKE SEWER RATS...

...FLEE!

OS --CAR... DON'T TOUCH... YOU MIGHT GET HURT *YOUR-SELF!*

LET JEAN... TRY TO RELEASE ME...

NO ONE EVER TRUSTS OLD OSCAR TO DO A BLIND THING.

NO OFFENSE INTENDED.

ME OL' MUM WAS THE SAME. *OSCAR,* SHE'D SAY...

OSCAR... BE QUIET.

THE METAL IS *ALIVE... TECHNO-ORGANIC!*

WE'D BETTER DO THIS SLOWLY. *APOCALYPSE* MIGHT HAVE LEFT SOME KIND OF...

...TRAP!

BLAST! IT'S GOT ME!

FIGHT IT, JEAN! *FIGHT IT!*

I'M TRYING TO MENTALLY *CONTROL* THE TENDRILS TO SET US FREE —

— BUT THEY'RE NOT *RESPONDING!*

DOWN HOUSE.

HOME OF CHARLES DARWIN, THE WORLD-RENOWNED NATURALIST.

WHAT, THEN, ARE THE *SOCIAL IMPICATIONS* OF ...*"DARWINISM?"*

GOOD QUESTION, MAUDE.

SLAVERY IS AN EVIL THAT DEBASES THE *SLAVEOWNER* HIMSELF.

WELL, CHARLES? DOESN'T ALL THIS SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST MALARKEY... JUSTIFY *SLAVERY*, FOR INSTANCE?

SIR, THERE'S ■ RATHER.. UNKEMPT-LOOKING GENTLEMAN TO SEE YOU.

TELL HIM I AM BUSY.

THE TRUTH IS... PEOPLE WILL PROBABLY USE MY THEORIES TO JUSTIFY WHATEVER *CREED* THEY CHOOSE TO ESPOUSE.

DARWIN! THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE ME!

BUT I WAS RIGHT --

-- I WAS RIGHT!

WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME...?

ESSEX? *NATHANIEL?* MY GOD, MAN! WHAT'S HAPPENED?

I HAVE SEEN IT WITH MY OWN EYES, CHARLES.

SEEN THE *VERACITY* OF MY THEORIES.

OUR SPECIES MOVES INELUCTABLY TOWARDS THE *GREAT MUTATION* --

-- AND I HAVE SEEN THE *FUTURE!*

THE STRONG WILL ■E BAD. THE GOOD, NOT STRONG ENOUGH.

YOU AND I, CHARLES, WE HAVE HELPED KILL OFF THE OLD GODS. BUT THERE WILL ■ *NEW ONES.*

AND THESE GODS WILL BE MADE IN OUR OWN *TWISTED IMAGE.*

AND THE WORST OF THEM... WILL BE CRUEL.

SO... VERY... *CRUEL.*

IS IT REBECCA? THE CHILD?

DO NOT SPEAK OF REBECCA! DO NOT SPEAK OF THE CHILD!

THEY [redacted] THINGS OF *LOVE* AND *GOODNESS* AND... AND THEY *WITHERED* AND DIED AT MY TOUCH!

AND NOW... I CANNOT EXIST WITH THIS INTOLERABLE BURDEN... THIS FIERCE PAIN THAT *CONSUMES* ME.

TONIGHT I *JOIN* REBECCA AND MY TWO CHILDREN...

... IN SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE OF NOTHING BUT AN ETERNITY OF THANKFUL *OBLIVION.*

I LEAVE THE FUTURE TO *YOU.*

YOU ARE WELCOME TO IT.

NATHANIEL! THIS IS MADNESS! LET ME...

... LET ME HELP YOU...

AS HE TURNS AND LOOKS BACK AT THE HIRSUTE BIOLOGIST, HE SEES TWO OF DARWIN'S CHILDREN.

WOKEN BY HIS RAISED VOICE, THEY STAND BLINKING IN THEIR NIGHT-GOWNS.

AND HE WONDERS AT THEIR INNOCENCE, UNSULLIED BY THE FILTH OF EXPERIENCE.

AND HE THINKS OF OTHER CHILDREN LIKE THEM.

HE THINKS OF THEM GROWING AS HIS OWN CHILDREN MIGHT HAVE.

AND THEN HE THINKS OF APOCALYPSE.

APOCALYPSE...

...APOCALYPSE!

AS I SUSPECTED.

THIS IS THE WEAKNESS, THE *EVIL* OF WEAKNESS... THAT WOULD BRAND OUR KIND UNFIT TO SURVIVE.

I ANTICIPATED THAT SHE WOULD RETURN FOR YOU -- INSTEAD OF *ABANDONING* YOU, AS ANY MORE *HIGHLY DEVELOPED* CREATURE WOULD --

-- AND SO I PRIMED MY STRONG-HOLD TO [redacted] *READY.*

NOW! MIGHT BE THE ONLY CHANCE I GET...

MUST THROW... EVERYTHING AT HIM... PSIONICALLY CHISEL INTO HIS... MIND...

AIGGH! WHAT --? MY BRAIN... PRESSURE BUILDING...

BEGINNING TO WEAKEN! NO... MUST... PROVE... I AM...

... SUPERIOR!

AGHHH

HE'S THROWING EVERYTHING *BACK* AT ME!

SO YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SEE INTO MEN'S MINDS. TO INFLUENCE THEM... TO *CONTROL* THEM.

SURELY, THERE IS NO POWER GREATER THAN THAT.

THIS IS SOME-THING I SHALL PREPARE FOR!

SCOTT... I THINK I MIGHT HAVE PERSUADED ESSEX... NOT TO ACCEPT APOCALYPSE'S OFFER...

WON'T HELP MUCH... IF WE LET APOCALYPSE TAKE CONTROL OF THE PLANET.

OH NO!

ESSEX?!

AH, I SEE YOU HAVE CAPTURED BOTH OF THE *MUTATED ONES.*

THEY ARE YOURS TO STUDY... TO DISMANTLE.

PIECE BY PIECE

CELL BY CELL.

NATHANIEL! DON'T ■ FOOLED BY THIS CREATURE! HE IS INHUMAN!

MAGNIFY YOUR OWN SUFFERING A BILLIONFOLD AND YOU HAVE SOME IDEA OF WHAT HE PLANS FOR THE NEXT FIVE MILLENNIA!

IF NOTHING ELSE... THINK OF YOUR DEAR ■FE AND *CHILD!*

BUT I AM. *I AM.*

SO *THIS* MUST ■ YOUR HUSBAND, ABOUT WHOM YOU SPOKE WITH SO MUCH AFFECTION. A MAN WHO HAS ALSO BEEN LABELED... *OBSESSED.*

HOW DO YOU DO IT, SIR? HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO SUFFER, TO GRIEVE, TO PERSEVERE...

...AND YET LOVE AND BE LOVED BY THIS WOMAN?

AND REMAIN A... GOOD PERSON?

I WOULD DEARLY LIKE TO *STUDY* YOU MORE CLOSELY... FOR YOU SEEM TO POSSESS A CAPABILITY THAT *I* DO NOT.

WHAT *IS* THAT?

IT'S CALLED NOT FORGETTING WHERE YOU COME FROM, ESSEX.

IT'S CALLED NOT FORGETTING THE PAIN THAT YOU'VE HAD -- BUT NOT LETTING IT TWIST YOU EITHER.

IT'S CALLED BEING *HUMAN.*

WELL... ARE YOU OR AREN'T YOU?

ENOUGH! I MADE YOU AN OFFER, ESSEX.

I WILL ENHANCE YOU IN EVERY WAY.

YOU WILL ■ FREE FROM THE YOKES OF WEAK HUMAN *MORALITY* AND *MORTALITY.*

YOUR BODY WILL ■ STRONG AND MALLEABLE.

BUT IN RETURN I DEMAND OBEDIENCE!

AND MY ANSWER IS...

YES.

SEVERAL LEVELS ABOVE...

OSCAR EMERGES FROM THE SEWER.

WHERE THE FREAKS AND VICTIMS OF ESSEX'S WORK HAVE GATHERED.

LADS! I NEED YOUR 'ELP!

THIS ENOUGH 'ELP FOR YOU, OSCAR!

UGNN!

KILL!

KILL HIM!

O-OKAY, LADS. I KNOW YOU HATE ME, YOU WAS TREATED LIKE ANIMALS...

JUST LIKE ME... WHEN I WAS A KID.

BUT THOSE TWO PEOPLE [redacted] THERE... THEY HELPED US.

THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO BUT THEY *DID*. IT WAS *THEM* THAT GOT YOU LOT OUT OF *MILBURY HOUSE*, THAT GOT YOU OUT OF YOUR CAGES.

IT WAS THEM THAT HELPED US STOP LIVING LIKE [redacted]

BUT IF WE TURN OUR BACKS ON THEM NOW... WE'LL STILL [redacted] ANIMALS --

-- CAGES OR NO CAGES.

COOTIE AND THAT DEVIL WILL HAVE WON.

I'M JUST A KID... AND I KNOW THAT OSCAR'S RIGHT!

YOU TELL 'EM, DANNY BOY.

THERE'RE STILL OTHER PRISONERS DOWN THERE, TOO. SUFFERING LIKE YOU WAS.

BUT WHAT... CAN WE... DO?

WE CAN START *FIGHTING BACK.*

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

MEANWHILE, THE PLAGUE PERCOLATES SLOWLY IN A CHAMBER OF APOCALYPSE'S STRONGHOLD.

ITS LETHAL INGREDIENTS ARE DESIGNED TO PARALYZE THE HIGHER, EVOLVED FUNCTIONS OF THE BRAIN... NEEDING ONLY A TOUCH OF SINISTER GENIUS TO BE COMPLETE.

AND THE MAN KNOWN AS NATHANIEL ESSEX WILLLINGLY UNDERGOES A HARROWING TRANSFORMATION.

WIRES AND TUBES TEAR INTO HIS FLESH, SENDING CATALYSTS OF MUTATION INTO THE VERY BUILDING BLOCKS OF HIS BEING...

...AND HE ALLOWS HIMSELF TO THINK OF REBECCA AND HIS DEAD FAMILY.

TO FEEL LEVELS OF PAIN HE HAS HITHERTO EVADED...

...FOR HE KNOWS THAT SOON... HE WILL LOSE ALL CAPACITY FOR SUCH FEELING...

AS A SEA MOLLUSC SLOWLY EVOLVES A SHELL TO PROTECT ITSELF AGAINST HARM...

...SO WILL ESSEX DEVELOP THIS METAPHORICAL SHELL... TO PROTECT HIMSELF FROM SUCH AGONY.

THE PREPARATIONS ARE *COMPLETE*. THE FINAL STAGE ENSUES.

BUT FIRST, AS YOU SHED YOUR *OLD SELF*, YOU MUST ALSO LOSE YOUR *OLD NAME*...

...AND CHOOSE A *NEW ONE*.

THERE IS NO DOUBT.

NO HESITATION.

HE REMEMBERS THE *LAST WORD* THAT HIS DEAR REBECCA SPOKE TO HIM.

FINALLY...

SINISTER.

AIEEE!

SO BE IT.

NATHANIEL ESSEX IS *DEAD*...

SINISTER IS BORN!

BEHOLD THE MARK OF APOCALYPSE --

-- KNOW YOU ARE FOREVER BRANDED!

BY THE TIME I RETURN... *MISTER SINISTER* WILL BE WORKING ON PERFECTING THE SCOURGE...

... AND THE WORLD AS YOU KNOW IT WILL BE IN *TERMINAL UPHEAVAL.*

AS APOCALYPSE LEAVES, THE SEWER RESOUNDS WITH THE AWFUL SCREAMS OF THE MAN WHO WAS NATHANIEL ESSEX...

... AS THE LAST VESTIGES OF HIS HUMANITY ARE TORN FROM HIS SOUL.

AND SCOTT SUMMERS, KNOWING HE HAS FAILED TO TURN THE COURSE OF DESTINY, PUTS IN A SUPERHUMAN EFFORT TO BURN AWAY THE MATERIAL AROUND HIS EYES.

SCOTT --!

TRIED TO BLAST THROUGH WITH EVERYTHING I'VE GOT --

-- BUT IT'S NO USE! THIS HELMET -- IT'S MADE OF *RUBY QUARTZ!*

SCOTT!

OSCAR AND THE FREAKS!

THEY'RE TEARING *THE MARAUDERS* APART!

SUDDENLY, BLAZING RAYS SCREAM THROUGH THE SEWER.

CYCLOPS' OPTIC BEAMS STRAFE THE ALIEN STRONGHOLD...

...BURNING AWAY THE FETTERS THAT CONTAIN JEAN GREY.

FREE! HOW..?

AS SOON AS OSCAR AND HIS PALS ATTACKED IT, THE STRONGHOLD WENT INTO *DEFENSE MODE.*

AND THE HELMET PULLED ITSELF *AWAY!*

THE MARAUDERS HAVE *VANISHED.*

AND WE STILL HAVE A *FEW HOURS...* TO FIND AND DESTROY APOCALYPSE.

BUT FIRST... JEAN, PSI-LINK WITH ME... LET ME SEE THROUGH YOUR EYES.

I NEED TO SEE THIS. THE MAN WHO HAS DONE SO MUCH... TO BRING US AND OTHERS SO MUCH *SUFFERING...*

...HE'S IN *THERE.*

HALFWAY BETWEEN *ESSEX* AND *SINISTER.*

BETWEEN *MAN* AND *MONSTER.*

WHAT CAN WE *DO..?*

SCOTT, THE CHAMBER —

-- IT'S *OPENING!*

THE NORMAL CROWDS GATHER AT THE END OF ELEGANT PALL MALL...

...FAMOUS FOR ITS MANY EXCLUSIVE GENTLEMEN'S CLUBS...

RUNNING FROM WHITEHALL...

...TO WHAT MIGHT BE SEEN AS THE CENTER OF THE EMPIRE.

WHERE A RAISED FLAG REVEALS THAT THE INHABITANTS ARE AT HOME.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

LONDON RESIDENCE OF QUEEN VICTORIA AND PRINCE ALBERT.

WHOSE RAILINGS ARE NO PROTECTION AGAINST THE POWER OF THE ONE SOMETIMES KNOWN AS EN SABAH NUR.

FOR TODAY, THE QUEEN AND KING DIE.

AND TOMORROW...

...THE AGE OF APOCALYPSE IS BORN!

TO BE CONTINUED